GODBE RESEARCH
Gain Insight

What determines whether a survey is statistically valid? In other words, how can the opinions of 400 residents speak for the City of Burbank as a whole?

(1) Did all voters in Burbank have an equal chance of being called to participate?

Yes, the telephone survey used random dialing with a proportionate, stratified sampling design – a database of registered voters was generated and organized by demographic characteristics and previous voting history. The telephone numbers within this database were dialed at random, so every voter had an equal chance of being interviewed.

(2) Is the sample of voters who participated in the survey representative of the voter population of the City of Burbank as a whole?

Yes, because of the stratified sampling design, the sample of voters is representative of the voter population in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, political party affiliation, and other demographic and behavioral characteristics. Additionally, it represents these demographic and behavioral characteristics in the correct proportions. Although not all voters participated in the survey, those who did not are represented by other voters who share their characteristics.

(3) Is the survey sample sufficiently large to accurately reflect the opinions of all voters – ideally large enough to produce a margin of error of less than 5 percent?

Yes, the sample of 400 voters produced a margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percent. Margin of error describes how precisely the opinions of the sample of voters represent those of the 82,328 adult residents of the City of Burbank. This level of precision is standard for planning surveys, and many cities that have larger populations than Burbank also use a sample of 400 voters. *In fact, national polls typically use a sample size of just 1,000 to speak for the entire U.S. population of 225 million adults.*